

ECVET BULLETIN

July 2009



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Editorial

by **Hélène Clark, Director, DG EAC, Lifelong Learning: policies and programme**

The Recommendation establishing the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training, now well known by the acronym ECVET, was adopted by the European Parliament on 18 December 2008 and the Council on 11 May 2009. The joint signing of the document by the presidents of both institutions is expected in the coming weeks. In addition, on 20 May, ECVET was formally “launched” in Prague, at the conference on the new European tools for vocational education and training.

Now, Member States and those engaged in Vocational Education and Training have a roadmap for the progressive implementation of ECVET. The first term fixed by the Recommendation to Member States and the European Commission is 2012. By this date, Member States are encouraged to create the necessary conditions and adopt measures that will enable them to deploy ECVET. This implies that countries’ competent institutions and their partners should examine the conditions under which ECVET will be adopted and used in the context of their vocational education and training and qualifications systems.

Reflecting on conditions to implement ECVET necessitates an inventory of rules and practices, including the formulation of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, which has already begun in many countries through the implementation of the Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It also requires analysing countries’ systems with regard to the major principles of ECVET (units of learning outcomes, assessment and accumulation of achieved learning outcomes,

ECVET points device, taking non-formal and informal learning into account etc) . This ‘snapshot’ of countries’ systems will reflect the competencies of the different actors involved in VET regarding the ECVET functions such as design of units of learning outcomes, allocation of ECVET points, assessment, validation and recognition. It will also facilitate identification of possible adjustments necessary in order to use ECVET in line with countries’ objectives.

The ECVET pilot projects, to which this newsletter is dedicated, are important in guiding the preparatory work for the adoption of ECVET. Promoters and partners of these projects are engaged in the process of sharing their work and their results. They also agreed to work towards common outcomes and contribute to the design and development of tools such as the ECVET users’ guide. In this context, the work of these projects goes well beyond the perimeter of their individual goals and objectives and they are closely involved in the roadmap of ECVET implementation and the associated events.

The major conference scheduled for November 17 and 18 2009 in Brussels will therefore be a special moment for European professionals of education and training concerned by ECVET. They will discover the latest findings and developments of these pilot projects, participate in ongoing debates on implementing and experimenting ECVET and compare their approaches with those of competent institutions and technicians from all EU Member States and beyond.

¹ This analysis can be supported by the studies funded by the Commission: ECVET Reflector et ECVET Connexion.

Hélène Clark, Director,
DG EAC, Lifelong
Learning: policies and
programme



First steps in using ECVET: setting up partnerships for credit transfer and using learning outcomes to understand different learning contexts

Overview of the second seminar of ECVET pilot projects (Paris 2-3 July 2009)

Daniela Ulicna, GHK Consulting

During their first meeting in Brussels on 23-24 April, the representatives from the eleven ECVET pilot projects have identified a sequence of stages that describe the project approaches to testing ECVET (see Box 1 below). This sequence depicts, in general terms, the preparation that is necessary prior to sending and receiving learners and transferring their credit. It applies to the specific context of testing projects which operate in qualifications systems where units of learning outcomes or credit points are not used. These stages will inspire the main themes for the technical seminars organised three times a year as part of the project cooperation activities. During these seminars, the projects are expected to discuss the methods and tools they are putting in place to test ECVET as well as to identify

and validate transferable practices and approaches to ECVET implementation.

Note: not all the projects observe all the steps as described below. This sequence represents a generalisation of their approach. Furthermore, depending on the project, some of the stages are completed outside the work funded by their project budget or have been completed prior to their application.

The second seminar organised in Paris on 2-3 July 2009 was concerned with the first two stages:

- Setting up partnerships for credit transfer
- Using learning outcomes to understand learning contexts in partner countries/ systems

This article briefly outlines the discussions and conclusions from this seminar. More information can be found on the ECVET project web-site:

<http://www.ecvet-projects.eu>

Box 1: Sequence of main stages in testing ECVET as identified by the ECVET pilot projects

Setting up a partnership	Design a network/ partnership that will enable credit transfer (involving the necessary competent institutions)
Understanding learning contexts in partner countries in order to put in place ECVET	Agree on the target group (the learners) for the work of the partnership (based on either occupations, job profiles, working tasks)
	Identify qualifications and respective programmes in the countries that correspond to this target group
	Use knowledge/skills and competence descriptors to understand learning outcomes from another context/ country.
Conception of transferable units	In the context of projects: Design units of learning outcomes (these can be of different nature: shared references, common units, units open to mobility) Note: in the context where units already exist in the qualifications system the situation is different and the projects reflect on how units from other systems relate to those of the home system.
	In the context of projects: Allocate ECVET points to qualifications and units Note: in a system where national credit points exist, project reflect on how these relate to the ECVET points.
Consolidating the partnership	Establish a Memorandum of Understanding
Creating conditions for credit transfer	Prepare the mobility phase (reflect on the relationship between units and the mobility phase, engagement of training centres or employers)
	Reflect and agree on assessment arrangements for the mobility phase.
	Reflect and agree on validation and recognition arrangements for the mobility phase.
Transferring credit	Testing through mobility: Learning agreement with the learner
Evaluation/Impact	Analyse the implications of using ECVET for the existing national systems and structures

Partnerships for credit transfer

As a means of supporting mutual trust among the different institutions involved in implementing and using ECVET, partnerships are the cornerstone of credit transfer. Of course the transfer of credit is also possible outside the framework of a partnership, on an ad-hoc basis, for example in case of learners who change country, system, or institution on their own initiative. However, a more systematic exchanges of learners is made easier by the existence or agreements underpinned by trust.

ECVET partnerships for mobility purposes have two dimensions:

- The international dimension (or the inter-systemic dimension) meaning they bring together competent institutions from different countries or systems;
- The national dimension (or the dimension internal to the qualifications system) which refers to the fact that they often have to combine different institutions from the same country or system;

The international dimension of partnerships is determined by various factors such as the prior existence of an international network, language or geographical proximity, existence of learners' exchanges, etc. The national dimension is determined by the existing division of competences concerning VET qualifications within the country. Indeed in order to make sure that learners' credit from another system can be recognised institutions competent for different aspects of vocational education and training have to be involved. These aspects are:

- Design of units and their description in terms of learning outcomes;
- Allocation of ECVET points;

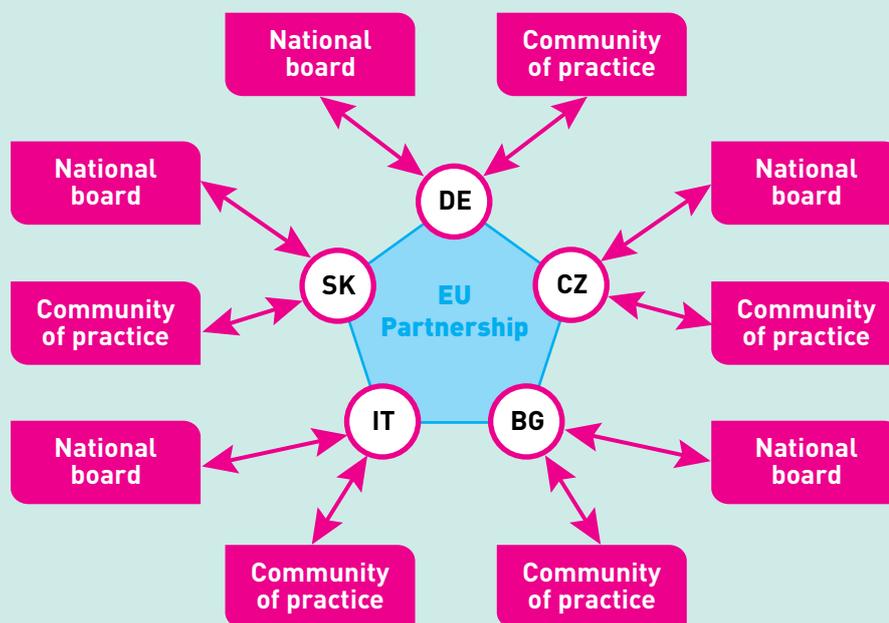
- Delivery of education and training corresponding to the units concerned by mobility;
- Assessment
- Validation
- Recognition

Depending on the system, these tasks or processes can be the competence of a single institution or of a number of different institutions. In any case it is crucial that ECVET partnerships bring together, in each country or system concerned, the stakeholders responsible for all these functions.

The architecture of partnerships involved in testing ECVET varies a great deal, depending on the methodology and the objectives of each pilot project. While some projects involve training centres from the very beginning, others start with co-operation at the level of institutions competent for designing qualifications (e.g. ministries or chambers). These are some of the approaches presented during the Paris seminar:

- The CREDCHEM project illustrates very well the two dimensions of ECVET partnerships. In this project the leading partners are actors with some competence (advisory not regulatory) concerning the design of qualifications and of assessment and it is their responsibility to create national networks of competent institutions. Institutions with statutory competence for designing qualifications, such as ministries and social partners are involved in "national boards". Training centres and employers with the competence to deliver training as well as to assess learners are involved in "communities of practice".

The CREDCHEM project illustrates very well the two dimensions of ECVET partnerships



- The approach presented by the ASSET project is based on the strong involvement of training centres from the beginning, but also on the constant engagement of institutions competent for qualifications design and recognition of learning outcomes in validation of project outcomes produced. Therefore the ASSET leading partners, who are the training centres, work together to identify common activities across the qualifications concerned, describe these in terms of learning outcomes, and organise them

in units. Each step is validated by the different competent institutions in countries participating in the project. In the next stage of the project, the institutions in charge of qualification design and recognition will have a much stronger role. They will develop an agreement on the transfer of credit including the design and signature of a Memorandum of Understanding as well as design a system for allocation of ECVET points. The approach of the Asset project is presented in the scheme below.

ASSET Project: Method Used

			Lead Partner	Associated Partner
OPERATIONAL LEVEL	1	Define the job profile to be used for the experiment	Training Centre	Labour Market/ Competnet Institution
	2	Identify, in each of the national contexts, a qualification corresponding to the defined job profile	Training Centre	Labour Market/ Competnet Institution
	3	Identify the areas of activity common to the different qualifications	Training Centre	Labour Market
	4	List the expected competences in each of these areas	Training Centre	Labour Market
	5	Organise these competences in units which may be open to mobility	Training Centre	Competent Institution
INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL	6	Develop a credit transfer system and build mutual trust tools Memorandum of understanding Learning agreement	Competent Institution	Training Centre
	7	Elaborate a credit point allocation system	Competent Institution	Training Centre
OPERATIONAL LEVEL	8	Envisage different scenarios for the ecvet mobility test	Training Centre	Competent Institution



Key issues to bear in mind when setting up partnerships for ECVET credit transfer

As a result of the project discussion several key issues for setting up new ECVET partnerships occurred. It is most likely that partnerships will be set up around a specific economic sector or occupational activity. The first thing those interested in using ECVET should do is to provide their partners with a mapping of the competent institutions for the different aspects of ECVET within their own

system. They should also be able to provide their partners with a description of the quality assurance processes in education and training in their system.

A second aspect that was highlighted is that ECVET partnerships should not omit the practical dimension of ECVET, and the fact that it will be immediately used by training centres and teachers. Nor should they omit the institutional dimension that is required to enable recognition.

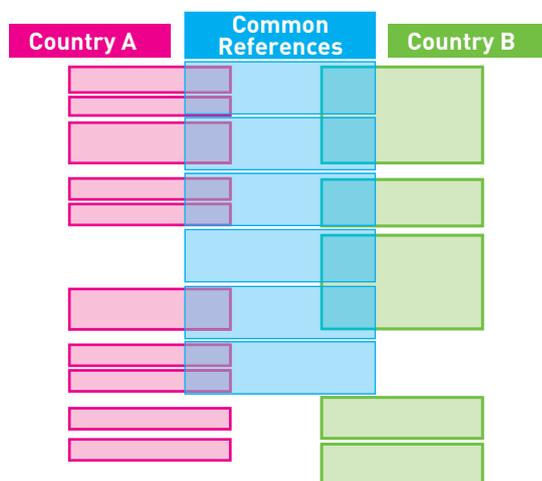
Finally, the ECVET partnerships should be organised around a methodological approach which makes each others' involvement and responsibilities clear.

Using learning outcomes to understand qualifications from different learning contexts

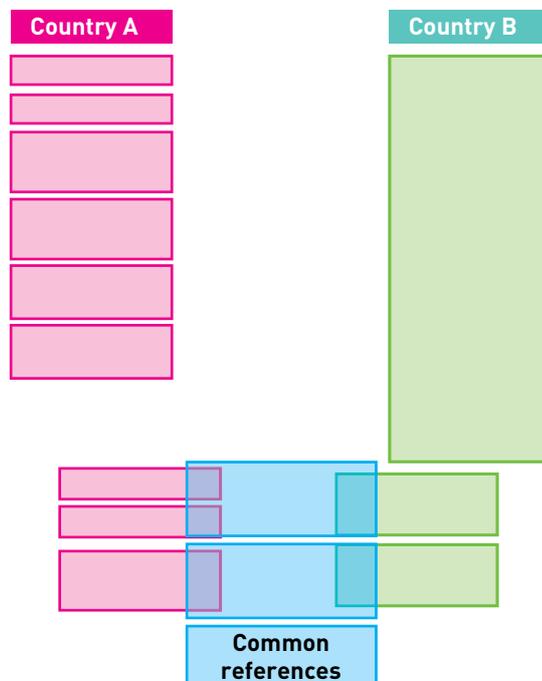
Countries have very different approaches to defining, naming, and describing their qualifications, making it difficult to identify those that are comparable. Therefore ECVET pilot projects typically start by identifying an occupation/ job profile and then look into the qualifications concerned. While this approach is not without obstacles (the occupational structures may differ, there may be more than one corresponding qualification, etc.) it appears less time consuming than starting by comparing qualifications that look alike (by their title for example) only to realise that they are very different.

In ECVET the learning outcomes approach enables identification of areas where qualifications overlap and hence where the transfer can take place. Among the existing and past pilot projects these three main approaches can be identified:

- Defining common learning outcomes based standards that can be implemented at national level.
- Defining common references, in terms of learning outcomes, which serve as a ‘reading grid’ for national qualifications. This means that the existing national qualifications may be compared with these references to identify commonalities. This is for example the approach used by the project Recomfor (previously Cominter).



- The third approach is in a way a “light” version of the above where only a small number of the common learning outcomes, which are shared across the different qualifications, are defined. This is the approach used by, for example, the Asset project.



Regarding the learning outcomes descriptions and the formulations used the pilot projects have identified these key issues:

- **The use of knowledge, skills and competence as descriptors:** some projects describe learning outcomes in these three columns, others do not. Furthermore, as the national qualifications frameworks become more widespread these will provide their own descriptors for learning outcomes. The project agreed that what is most important is that these three elements can be identified in the description, independent of the exact template used..
- **The level of detail:** Here no exact response has been provided so far. There is an agreement that, while a more general description may be sufficient for identifying overlap across qualifications, more specific descriptions may be needed to inform assessment. As the projects get to the stage of testing ECVET on the group, meaning with learners engaged in mobility and training providers assessing them, the level of detail needed will become clearer.
- **The importance of assessment criteria:** While it is important that the qualification is described in learning outcomes, a learning outcomes-based description of assessment criteria/standards is also necessary. The Paris seminar did not discuss this aspect in depth as the question of assessment will be dealt with in one of the forthcoming seminars, most likely in 2010.

The ECVET projects are at different stages of identifying and describing learning outcomes. Some have already developed tools to do so (see the project web-site), while others are at the beginning of this process. However, in all cases the extent to which these descriptions are fit for the purposes of credit transfer still needs to be tested.

Deutsche ECVET

Testing ECVET in the German context

Based on the presentation by Mr Peter Thiele, German federal Ministry of Education and Science, during the conference **New Tools for Vocational Education and Training: ECVET, EQARF** organised by the Czech Presidency on 20 May 2009 in Prague

The German initial VET system is strongly geared towards acquisition of full qualifications. Though Initial VET under the dual system performs well in guaranteeing practical relevance of training for the labour market, it has restricted flexibility. The certification process is currently not progressive and not based on accumulation: i.e. the acquisition of expected competences is certified by one final examination. The introduction of units in the German system is a new idea and implies major changes. This is however justified by the benefits of what a unit-based system is expected to deliver in German VET. These expected benefits include enabling and stimulating innovation, enhancing quality and enabling permeability between the different VET sub-systems (preparatory courses in the “transition system”, dual system, school-based VET, continuing training). Facilitating permeability is especially important for Germany in the current context of the economic crisis. Previous downturns show that when the economic context is not favourable, enterprises recruit less apprentices to the dual VET system and VET in preparatory classes and school-based context expands. The problem is that there are few connections and pathways between these separate systems. When learners want and have the possibility to progress to the dual system they often required to start their apprenticeship from the beginning, independent of what has previously been achieved. Similarly when individuals who have dropped out of the system and later integrate into another system, they receive no formal recognition for prior learning achievements.

The Deutsche ECVET (DECVET) initiative finances national pilot projects which explore how a unit-based credit system can enhance permeability in the German context

The Deutsche ECVET (DECVET) initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research finances national pilot projects which explore how a unit-based credit system can enhance permeability in the German context. Four aspects of permeability and flexibility are tested:

- Passing from preparation classes to the dual system recognising the learning outcomes achieved in the preparation classes;
- Making the dual system more flexible with offering the possibility of optional units;
- Creating common units between the school-based and the dual system;
- Enabling learners who have initial qualifications to achieve partial VET qualifications through continuing training.

There is an important parallel effect of this project that fits with the broader German reform agenda. This is to support the transition towards learning outcomes oriented vocational education and training.

The DECVET testing process brings together a large spectrum of stakeholders: the Federal Ministries together with the Lander institutions, labour market representatives and industrial partners along with stakeholders from the training sector. In spring 2009 the projects completed the translation of inputs to learning outcomes. Future work in 2009-2010 will concentrate on clustering learning outcomes into units, exploring the requirements on assessment, validation and recognition. During the testing phase the projects are given space to allow for experimentation. As such, it is anticipated that the projects will identify a variety of solutions. The scientific support given to the projects in addition to their cooperation will facilitate the identification of success factors. It will also enable the work of the pilots to be consolidated into a consistent approach to formulating units.

For more information on the Deutsche ECVET please visit: <http://www.decvet.net/>



DECVET

AEROVET

Testing the principles of accumulation and transfer in the Aeronautics industry

Based on a document prepared by the AEROVET partners¹

The partners in the Aerovet project have, in the recent years, performed a number of studies on VET in the aircraft industry in Spain, France, the UK, and Germany. One unexpected outcome was the realisation that, in these countries several, almost independent, systems of certification coexist. Besides the national VET-regulations in this sector, the European Aviation Safety Agency (http://www.easa.eu.int/ws_prod/index.html) provides a set of modules that must be certified to achieve a licence for aircraft maintenance. The main industrial partner involved in the AEROVET partnership, AIRBUS, additionally owns a third system where each worker, independently of his/her prior vocational qualification, has to attend additional seminars (provided by the quality department) before s/he is allowed to work.

With the ECVET proposal, the partners want to explore how the idea of “transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes” fits to these existing systems. Can ECVET provide the possibility to combine the different systems of certifying? What could be the common basis for ECVET regarding the different national systems of VET?

The point of departure of the project is the observation that the four partner national VET systems differ greatly. While the French system is school-based, the German one dual, the UK is unit-based and in Spain no organised formal training exists in the field of aircraft production. Therefore the training programmes and curriculum provide no input that could be taken as a blueprint for the ECVET-units. However, analysing the work processes in the four countries the partners identified core profiles, formulated as sums of Typical Professional Tasks (cp. <http://www.pilot-aero.net/>). These are the starting point of the new project – AEROVET.

The compatibility of the Typical Professional Tasks (TPT) with the concept of ECVET units will be tested. The idea underlying the development of TPTs is that they support a work-process oriented certificate which is built on mutual confidence.

¹ Annie Boudier, Céreq (Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications), Rainer Bremer, ITB (Institute of Technology and Education in Bremen), Alan Brown, University of Warwick, Laureano Jiménez, URV (Universitat Rovira i Virgili), Andreas Saniter, ITB (Institute of Technology and Education in Bremen), Alain Savoyant, Céreq (Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications)

Core profiles as a common basis for further activities in transnational VET

The typical professional tasks (TPT) identified for a specific occupational field are considered to be a valid point of reference for describing and assessing vocational learning outcomes. These tasks represent the skilled labour in the respective occupational field, and are described in terms of complete jobs including planning and controlling aspects. TPTs are performed at workplaces within real work processes, which are organized in consecutive work cycles. Within the work cycles different actions can be distinguished. These actions can be described in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence. After analysing dozens of workplaces it became clear that work processes, and work cycles, are strongly determined by the product, and the production method, respectively. However a transparent and broadly understandable description of competences based on products and production methods is not desirable. Even expert workers from another plant in the same sector would not be able to comprehend them. Therefore, combining the work processes in different plants, the project partners found a set of very clear ‘work steps’ which are repeated in almost all workplaces. These work steps are complete actions and the amount of these steps within a TPT varies from 5 to 15. The TPT titles are presented in the box 1 below.

As already noted, the definition of TPTs was part of a previous project. The AEROVET project will elaborate a further division of these quite general TPT in sub-tasks and further more in elementary tasks, directly corresponding to the results expected from the worker. These sub-tasks will enable the knowledge, skills, and competence required to perform the work step to be made explicit. Such analysis faces the difficulty of finding the right “size” for those elementary tasks, while avoiding atomization of the action.

As a result of this work the project will, in close cooperation with the training providers concerned, develop common units and modules that could be applied in different national contexts, and map them directly against ECVET criteria. This will enable them to map the units and modules achieved in the national context against each other using the ECVET principles.

The AEROVET method to defining TPTs can be summarised as follows:

- Workshops bringing together experienced workers identify and validate the learning outcomes based on working tasks requirements. These constitute the core profile of vocational tasks.
- Work process analysis identifies on which level these learning outcome requirements take place in the partner's facilities.
- The development of the apprentices or trainees competence is individually assessed against the learning outcomes requirements.

Box 1: Aerovet Typical Professional Tasks for Aircraft maintenance professionals

Mechanic TPTs	Electronic TPTs
Production of metallic components for aircraft or ground support equipment	Production of bunched circuits for aircraft systems
Production of components of plastics or composite materials for aircraft or ground support equipment	Production or modification of electric devices
Operating and monitoring of automated systems in the aircraft production	Passing bunched circuits in aircraft systems
Joining and dissolving of structural components and aircraft airframes	Assembly and disassembly of subsystems and devices at aircraft systems
Assembly and disassembly of equipment and systems in/at the aircraft airframe	Modification of aircraft systems
Functional checks and tuning at the aircraft	Functional checks and system audit of supply units and control systems
Maintenance and inspection of the aircraft	Functional checks and system audit of information and communication systems
Analysis and recondition of malfunctions at system components	Analysis and repair of malfunctions at bunched circuits in aircraft systems
Analysis and reconditioning of damage on structure components	Analysis and repair of malfunctions at supply units and control systems
Reconditioning of accessory equipment	Analysis and repair of malfunctions at information and communication systems
Production of metallic components for aircraft or ground support equipment	Maintenance and inspection of aircraft systems
Independent quality inspections	

Source: AEROVET

Focus on assessment:

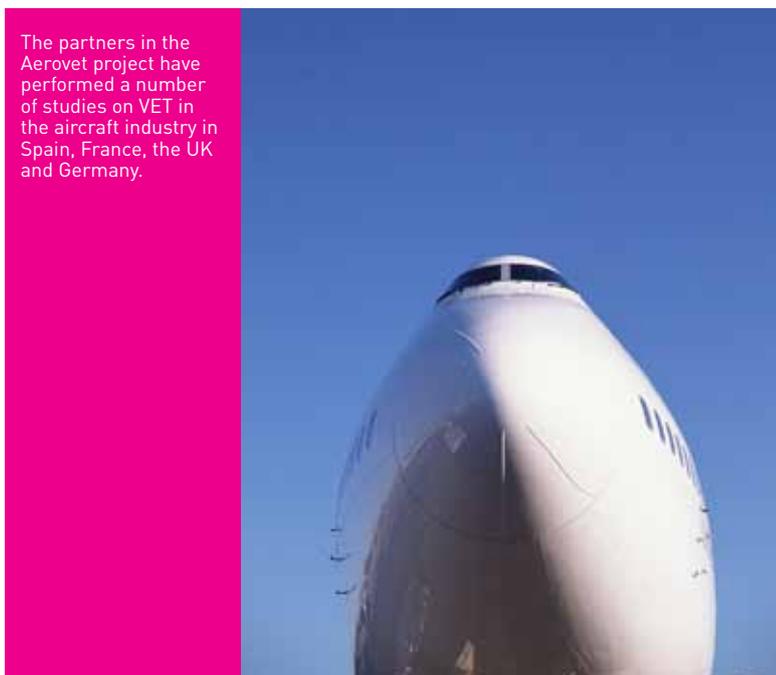
The project aims at developing a model to assess learning outcomes by describing an individual’s work performance. Expert workers are asked to evaluate the performance of apprentices in terms of the quality of their participation in the work process. During the assessment process the expert confirms that the trainee has observed the expected work processes, furthermore, he judges whether the trainee has worked under (close) instruction, under surveillance, or if they have worked autonomously.

By confirming that a trainee has worked autonomously, the judge is confirming that the trainee has mastered the full set of competences, knows what to do both before, and after a specific task, has the specific knowledge required, etc. This mode of assessment guarantees the instrument’s competence orientation and makes the assessment documentation transparent.

Some further questions to be asked by the project

Implementation of a unit-based system, where such system does not currently exist and where the VET provision is very non-formal (like it is the case of aircraft industry training in Spain), could be seen as an advantage from the pedagogical point of view. However, to get support from enterprises there are some questions that will need to be further explored by the AEROVET project:

- Will ECVET have any impact on the employability, adaptability, and entrepreneurial spirit of staff?
- Will the development of a unit-based qualification allow trainers and experts to respond swiftly, dynamically, and extremely flexibly to the qualification requirements from the industry?
- Will it ease the life-long learning on the job for people working in a particular sector?
- What is going to be the ability to integrate the developed units into a very wide variety of national training and advanced training schemes?



The partners in the Aerovet project have performed a number of studies on VET in the aircraft industry in Spain, France, the UK and Germany.

What's New

ECVET Recommendation adopted by the Council

The ECVET Recommendation has been adopted by the Council on 11 May 2009 after its adoption by the Parliament on 18 December 2008. The different translations of the Recommendation are currently undergoing final approval and the solemn signature by both institutions is expected in autumn 2009. The English version of the Recommendation can be found on:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st03/st03747-re03.en08.pdf>

Over 100 ECVET pilot projects

The European Commission has identified that counting the past and current projects funded through both the centralised and decentralised actions of the Lifelong Learning Programme there are already over one hundred ECVET projects running or completed across Europe.

Conference on "Qualifications for lifelong learning and employability"

Cedefop, Thessaloniki, 5 and 6 October 2009

Qualifications are pivotal to building up a common European Education and Training area and labour market. However the roles and functions of qualifications are changing. The Cedefop October 2009 conference will discuss the overall implications of these changes for future research and European policy cooperation in education and training post-2010. The conference is conceived around three main issues: qualifications and its stakeholders; qualifications as currencies and expressions of value; qualifications and lifelong learners.

Workshop on "Sectoral dynamics and European Qualifications Framework"

Brussels, 5 and 6 November 2009

Cedefop organises, for the second time, a peer learning workshop linked to the European Qualifications Framework. This event will address the sectoral dynamics and cross-sectoral developments of Qualifications Frameworks. It is part of Cedefop activities to support the European Commission on the challenges involved in the implementation of the EQF at European, national and sectoral level. The event will bring together project promoters of selected ongoing EQF/Sectoral LdV pilot projects (2007 and 2008) notably national authorities, sectors as well as social partners, non-governmental organisations and representatives from the Commission.

Europass, ECVET and EQF for documentation, validation and certification of learning outcomes

Cedefop is carrying out a study to experiment how the Europass framework, more specifically the Europass Certificate Supplement and Europass Mobility, need to be adjusted to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by ECVET and EQF. This study also aims at assessing the relevance and potential of Europass Mobility and Certificate Supplement for the purpose of documenting, validating and certifying learning outcomes with reference to ECVET and EQF.

Further information: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/working/procurement.asp?idnews=4533>.

On Europass: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>

The ECVET Bulletin presents news and articles on ECVET developments. It is published quarterly, by GHK Consulting, as part of the contract to Support testing and development of ECVET, commissioned by the European Education Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

The next issue of the ECVET Bulletin will be published at the end of October 2009. If you want to subscribe to the electronic version of the Bulletin, you can register following the instructions here:

<http://www.ecvet-projects.eu/Bulletins/registration.aspx>

Any comments or suggestions regarding the ECVET Bulletin should be submitted to the following address: contact@ecvet-projects.eu.

If you are involved in an ECVET pilot project or a related initiative and interested in sharing your experience and achievements, we would be very pleased to publish and article about your work.

